

LOVE MATTERS MOST
40 Days of Love - Part 1
Rick Warren
Sept. 13-14, 2008

*“Which is the most important command?” Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. ‘This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: ‘Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.”
Matt. 22:36-39 (LB)*

3 LAWS OF LOVE

I. THE BEST USE OF LIFE _____
Why?

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:8 (NIV)

“If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars. For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen.” 1 John 4:20 (TEV)

*“Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.”
Col. 3:14 (CEV)*

“Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8 (NLT)

“God wiped out the charges that were against us for disobeying the Law... He took them away and nailed them to the cross.” Col. 2:14 (CEV)

*“Three things will continue forever: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.”
1 Cor. 13:13 (NCV)*

*“No matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.”
1 Cor. 13:3 (MSG)*

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II. THE BEST EXPRESSION OF LOVE _____

"We must show love through actions that are sincere, not through empty words."

1 John 3:18 (GW)

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Gal. 5:6 (NIV)

"Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins." Eph. 5:2 (NLT)

III. THE BEST TIME TO LOVE _____

"Whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone..." Gal. 6:10 (NLT)

"Use every chance you have for doing good." Eph. 5:16 (NCV)

"Whenever you possibly can, do good to those who need it. Never tell your neighbors to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now." Prov. 3:27-28 (GN)

"Eagerly pursue and seek to acquire love. Make it your aim, your great quest..."
1 Cor. 14:1 (Amplified)

Homework

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If you want your life to count you have to focus it. You don't have time for everything. Everyone agree with that? You don't have time for everything. And not everything is of equal value.

Jesus said there are two things that are more valuable in life than anything else. He said its love. Loving God and loving each other.

Last week we looked at this verse. It's called the Great Commandment when we were talking about five definitions of love. If you missed last week, I highly recommend that you go listen to last week's message because a lot of what you've been taught about love is just flat out wrong. It's wrong. And you need to listen to that message on building healthy relationships.

One of the verses that we looked at last week is where Jesus was asked, what is the most important command? And Jesus replied *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself."*

Circle "most important" and "second most important." God says these are the two things that matter most in life. Love for God and love for people. He says if you get these two things you've got it.

When God created you, have you ever thought why didn't he just take you to heaven? Why did he just put you on earth? You're only here for sixty, eighty, maybe at the most a hundred years and you're going to live for eternity in heaven or hell. Why didn't God just create you and take everybody to heaven? Why did he put us here on earth for eighty or so years?

The Bible is very clear about it. That God put you here on earth to do two things: to learn to love God and to learn to love other people. Life is one giant lesson in love. Life is not about acquisition – how much I get. It's not about accomplishment – how much I do. It's not about achievement – how much I earn. It's not about all the other things we're told life's about. Because all of that you're going to leave behind. You're not taking your career to heaven. You're not taking your car to heaven. You're not taking your china to heaven. You're not taking your house to heaven. But you are taking your character. You're taking *you*.

God put you on earth for eighty to a hundred years so you can learn to love. Life is all about learning how to love. Jesus says here the two most important things in life are learn to love God with all your heart and learn to love everybody else. He says you get that, you've got life. If you don't get that, wrong answer. You just wasted your life.

So in conclusion, thank you all for coming to Saddleback Church.

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That's what I want to point out today. We're going to talk about the priority of love.

We know love's important but we forget it. And we get so distracted by other things. This morning we're going to look at what I call the three laws of love. If you're going to ever be a great lover, you're going to learn to really love God and learn to love other people, you've got to learn and keep in your mind the three laws of love.

Law number one: **The best use of life is love.**

That's law number one. God says you need to make learning how to love your number one priority, your primary objective, your greatest ambition, your life purpose. More than anything else he says you need to say, I want to learn how to be a loving person; how to love God and how to love other people.

Why does he say that? Four reasons; four reasons why love is more important than anything else.

1. Love validates my faith.

What does that mean? It proves that I really am in God's family. It proves that I really am going to heaven. It proves that I am saved; that I have been born again; that I'm a part of the family of God; that I'm on the right side, not the wrong side. He says the proof of that is love. It validates your faith.

If you ever go to the White House, before they let you in you have to authenticate or validate your identity. You have to prove you are who you say you are. They don't just let anybody into the White House. You have to take some documents and sometimes you take a thumbprint. There's all different kinds of things in order to validate that you are who you say you are before they let you into the White House.

That's true with a lot of things in life. You can't just walk up to an ATM and say "Give me some money." You have to validate that that card really belongs to you by putting in a PIN code.

In order for you to get into heaven, you have to validate your identity. You have to prove that you really are a child of God; that you have trusted Christ; that you know him; that you have a relationship with God. That you know God.

How do you validate that identity? The Bible says that God looks at your lifestyle and says, "Do you love? Do you love God with all your heart? Do you love your neighbor as yourself?" The Bible says "*Whoever does not love does not know God.* [That's pretty clear.] *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*"

The reason why God wants you to learn to love on earth is because he wants you to become like him. 1 John 4:20 says, "*If we say we love God, but we hate other, we're liars.* [That's pretty blunt.] *For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen.*" Love validates my faith. It proves I really am a child of God.

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2. Love integrates my life.

In other words it becomes the dominant life principle by which everything else in my life is integrated. My social life, my financial life, my church life, my work life, my sex life, my friend life. Every other part of my life becomes integrated by love. You need to have something at the core of your heart that draws your life together. Otherwise your life is just fragmented. You do a little of this, a little of that, a little of this, a little of that... When your life is fragmented, when your life is segmented you lack integrity. Integrity means your whole life is integrated. It's a whole. It's one.

Last week we talked about everybody's got a dominant life principle. That means everybody builds their life around something. Some people build their life around money, getting rich. Some people build their life around fame, becoming popular. Some people build their life around success. Some people build their life around sex. Some people build their life around a hobby. There's lots of things that you can make your dominant life principle in your life. But what you need is something that's so strong at the center it's not going to fall apart when the trials come. When tribulation, when problems, when the road ends, the emotional earthquakes and the financial hurricanes. And all of the things of life hit you and batter you, you better have something at the center of your life that's going to hold you together or you'll come apart.

The Bible says the only thing strong enough to do that is love. Love for God and love for each other. It becomes the center and it brings everything else into focus.

"Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything else together." It ties it all together. It integrates my life.

3. Love compensates for my sin.

This is really good news when you understand it. It means when I blow it, when I make mistakes, when I sin, when I have faults and fumbles, that God says, "My first question is not, did he sin? My first question is, does he love me? Does he love my Son Jesus Christ? If she/he does we're just going to cover over that sin. We're going to compensate for it. We know he/she's imperfect. But what matters most is, do they love me?"

1 Peter 4:8 *"Most important of all continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins."* What does that mean? Love covers a multitude of sins.

It has two meanings. First, it means when you love Jesus Christ and he loves you it covers up all your sins that you've ever done. When Jesus Christ came to earth and died on the cross, he stretched out his hands and said, I love you this much; this is how much I love you. I'm willing to die for you. I'm willing to take the punishment for all the laws, the moral laws that you've broken. I'll take your rap. I'll do your time. I'll serve your sentence. I'll pay your debt. Jesus says because I love you everything you've ever done and everything you ever will do that is wrong, will be forgiven. Is that good news? That is good news! *That is very good news!*

The Bible says that the love of Jesus Christ covers my sins. He says like a blanket we're just going to cover it all up. Nobody can see it. God says, because I want you in heaven, heaven's perfect and you're not, so we've got a problem. We've got to deal with all of your

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imperfections. Jesus says, I will go to earth, I will die for them. I will die on the cross. I'll show them how much I love them. My love, if they will accept my love, it will cover all their sins so they don't have to pay for them any more. That's good news.

The other thing this means when it says, "*Love covers a multitude of sins*," is that once I've been forgiven God gives me the power to let other people off the hook. I've been forgiven and I can forgive others. He gives me the ability to let people off the hook. To cut them some slack.

We talked a little bit about this last week. You find somebody who is judgmental, they're self-righteous, always putting other people down, they're critical, they're always negative, they're always harping at perfectionist things. It means they don't feel love themselves. They've never experienced the grace of God. When you understand how much you've been forgiven, you just start cutting a lot of other people some slack. When you understand how much you've been graced by God, you just start being more gracious with other people. You just don't get as angry as you used to. You don't get as impatient as you used to. You don't get so upset when other people blow it. Because you know how much you're been forgiven and now you are able to cover the sins of others.

Love covers a multitude of sins. When you really love somebody and they blow it, love doesn't rub it in. Love rubs it out. That's the mark of love. Love doesn't rub it in. Love rubs it out.

God says I want you to experience my love so you can pass it on to other people. You can be gracious and forgiving and merciful and cut people some room when they blow it and they make mistakes. Love covers.

The history of the world is that God uses imperfect people. He uses "sinners" to get the job done. He uses everybody who is imperfect but who loves him.

One of the great stories in the Bible is the story of King David. He was the king of Israel. David was not exactly a perfect guy. In fact, he blew it a lot. He lied. He cheated. He stole another guy's wife. He committed adultery. Then he had that guy murdered to cover up his sin. Not exactly a nice guy.

But the one thing about David is when David blew it he admitted it quickly and he would repent quickly. He said, "I'm so sorry God. I shouldn't have done that. I blew it but I really love you." David, even in the middle of all of his mess ups, he loved God. He said I want to do what's right. I don't always do it but I want to do it and I love you, Lord.

God says about David, that is a man after my own heart.

That's both confusing and comforting. It's confusing because how can he say that? That David's a man after your own heart. He's just blowing it and making all these mistakes.

But it's comforting because he says I'm going to cover over his sins. Because he loves me.

Get this, if you don't get anything else. More important than you being perfect is that you love God with all your heart. God doesn't expect you to be perfect. In fact, he knows you can't be perfect. In fact, you stopped being perfect a long, long time ago. So forget that one. What

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matters is not that you haven't screwed up in life, or messed up in life. What matters is do you love God with all your heart? And love your neighbor as yourself? God says if you do that it will cover a multitude of sins.

Isn't that good news?

Do you know why God uses me? It's not because I'm so handsome. It's not because I'm perfect. On no! Your pastor... I sin a lot. I make a lot of mistakes. I have weaknesses, I have faults, I have failures. I flub up. I make bad decisions.

In spite of all my sins, God uses me in spite of my imperfections. Why? Because God knows in the depth of my heart that I love Jesus Christ. I love him with all of my heart. I will always be grateful for the fact that my past has been forgiven, I've got a purpose for living and I've got a home in heaven. I love God with all my heart.

God looks down and goes, In spite of Warren's goof-ups he really does love me and I'm going to use him.

That's what God wants to say about you. I want people to say about me, "That guy loves God." And that's what I want people to be able to say about you. That you love God. Why? It's the most important thing. It validates my faith – it shows I really am a follower of God, that I know him. It integrates my life because I treat everybody the same way. I love them all. It compensates for my sin. God says, yeah he messes up a lot but he really loves me and he loves my son, Jesus Christ.

Then there's a fourth thing that love does.

4. Love reverberates forever.

What does that mean? It means it goes on and on and on. Love reverberates forever. It echoes into eternity. In fact, it's the only thing in your life that's going to last. Everything else you do is temporary. But every single loving action is going to go on for eternity and God's going to reward it in eternity.

In fact, the Bible says this. *"These three things continue forever. Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love."* He says it's going to continue forever. If you want a legacy to last, if you want people to remember you, love. Love lasts. In fact, nothing else does.

I hate to tell you this but people are going to forget all your work. People are going to forget all your wealth. People are never remembered for what they made. They're remembered for what they gave away. They're remembered for their love.

And I even hate to tell you this but the truth is one day all your trophies are going to be trashed. Given enough time somebody's going to throw them away. That bowling trophy! That merit badge! That report card! That certificate of accomplishment! That gold watch that you got for retirement! Nobody's going to remember those things. I doubt that you have any of the awards that your grandparents got. Some day people are going to throw away the picture of Rick on the cover of *Time*. Probably my kids! It doesn't really matter because none of that is going to last.

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Only what's going to last is what you did in love. Nothing else you do on this planet is permanent. It's all temporary. You didn't bring any of it in with you. You're not taking any of it out with you. It's all temporary. All those trophies will be trashed one day.

As a pastor I have been with a lot of people as they took their dying breath. Whether it was in a hospital or whether it was in a home. I have stood at the bedside as many people moved from this life into eternity. I have to tell you that in over thirty years I've never had anybody say to me as they were taking their dying breath "Pastor, I'm about to die. Please bring me my certificate of award... I want to look at it one more time. Bring me my diploma. Bring me my report card. Bring me the trophy." Nobody ever asks for things.

When people are dying they don't want things around them. What they want is people. They want the people that they love and they want to love those people.

The truth is everybody – every one of us – will eventually learn the basic truth of life that life is about relationships not accomplishments. Everybody's going to eventually learn it on their deathbed. When you're dying you're going to want people around you who love you, not things. So we're all going to figure that out.

My prayer for you as your friend and your pastor who loves you is this: I want you to learn that today. Not when you die. I want you to learn that what matters right now are relationships. What matters is do I love God with all my heart? And do I love everybody else? Because that's why God put me on earth for these eighty or so years.

In fact, the Bible says life without love is worthless. It is a wasted life. The Bible says this "*No matter what I say or what I believe or what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.*" Bankrupt!

If that's true, and of course it is, then why do relationships get the short end of the stick? If we know it's really about love, it's really about relationships, why do we always short shrift our relationships? We don't have time for the people we love. We don't have energy for the time that we love. Our attention goes to other things.

Why? We get busy. When we get busy we get preoccupied with things that are of lesser importance. Most people have given first class allegiance to second class causes. Those causes have betrayed them. They get busy and here's what happens. I've seen it all over Southern California. When you get overloaded and you get in a hurry you start doing what I call relational skimming. Relational skimming. You start skimming off the top. You say, I don't have time to get it all done so what I'm going to do is, I'm going to skim on my relationships. I don't have time to be alone with God in a quiet time. I don't have time to go to a small group. I don't have time for my wife or my husband or my kids. I'm going to just cut it back. I don't have time to go out with my friends. I don't have time for relationships.

And you start relationally skimming. That's where you start cutting back. Big mistake! Life isn't about the other stuff. It's about the relationships. We focus on what's urgent not what's important. We start focusing on getting work done and reaching goals and paying bills. Five years from today you're not going to care about those bills. But five years from today you're going to have the results of those relationships you skimmed on. Let's put it into perspective.

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Nothing can take the place of love. I know people who have all the money in the world and all the success and all the fame in the world and they would tell you that if your relationships are messed up, life sucks. It doesn't matter how much money you've got. It doesn't matter how famous you are. If your relationships aren't loving and developing, life is miserable. Nothing can take the place of that. Wealth can't, fame can't, success can't. All of these things.

One day you're going to stand before God in heaven after this trial run here on earth and he's going to say, "Why should I let you into heaven?" One of the things he's going to say to you is, "Tell me about what you did on earth." He's not going to say, "Tell me about your career. I'm fascinated by that. Tell me about how many jobs you had, how many sales you made, how many deals you closed." He's not going to ask that. God is not going to ask, "How big did you get your bank account to be? How much did you invest and where did you invest it and how much did you lose..." He's not going to ask that. He's not going to ask, "Show me your credit report." He's not going to say, "Show me your report card." He's not going to say, "Tell me about your handicap. Tell me how well you did in sports."

No. He's going to say this. "Did you do what I put you on earth to do? Did you learn to love me with all your heart and my Son Jesus who I sent? Did you learn to love everybody else? That's why I put you there. Tell me about your relationships."

Why are we doing 40 Days of Love? Because I want the rest of your life to be the best of your life and we all need to work on relationships.

A lot of times we think that relationships, we know they're a good thing, but we act like they're something we've kind of got to make time for. Like, "I really need to make time in my schedule for relationships." Like that's one more thing I need to add to my life. No. It is your life. All the other stuff is peripheral. Your relationships are your life. Your job and everything else are peripheral. God didn't put you here on earth for a job. He put you here to learn to love. When we say, "I need to squeeze relationships into my schedule. I need to fit it in." As if it's just one important part. That means you're missing the point.

Life is not about achievement. It's about love. Busyness causes us to forget that. What we forget is the second law of love. Law number one is the best use of life is love.

Law number two: **The best expression of love is time.**

You spell love T-I-M-E. The Bible says this in 1 John 3:18 "*We must show love through actions.* [Love is not something you feel, something you say. It's something you do.] *We must show love through actions. Actions that are sincere, not through empty words.*"

Question: What is the most desired gift of love? When people are in love, when people show love, what is the most desired gift? It's not diamonds. It's not chocolate. It's not flowers. The most desired gift of love and the most priceless gift of love is focused attention. It is time. When you give your time to someone that is the greatest gift you can give. A kid, a husband, a wife, a friend or anybody else. Giving your attention is the greatest gift you can give somebody. Why? Because your time is your most precious resource.

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We all have different amounts of energy. We all have different amounts of wealth. We all have different amounts of talent. We all have different amounts of personality. But we all have the exact same amount of time. A hundred sixty-eight hours a week. You get to choose how you use it. As an adult American you will live an average of twenty-five thousand five hundred and fifty days. What are you going to do with that time?

Every time I give you a minute of my time I'm never going to get it back. Every time I give you an hour of my time I'm never going to get it back. Every time I give you a day of my life I'm never going to get it back. I can always get more money but I can't get more time. I only have a certain amount of allotted days and you do too. So you better choose very carefully how you give your time. You give your time to a TV program. You've just given an hour of your life you're never getting back. Was it worth it? You need to decide. What is my time worth?

That's why when you give something to people, the most valuable, precious thing you can give them is your attention. Because when you give attention to somebody you're saying, you matter to me. You are valuable. You are worth listening to. You're saying all kinds of things when you give people your attention. It is the part of your life you're never going to get back.

Let me explain it. Jesus said that the essence of relationships is not what we do for each other. It's not what we do. And Jesus said that the essence of real relationships is not what we give to each other – presents and things that we give. Jesus taught that the essence of true loving relationships is how much we give of ourselves to that person. Our lives. That's love.

Guys, as men, we don't get this. I don't know if we lost that gene somewhere or something. But this one just does not compute to most guys. We don't get this. And I have to admit that I didn't get it for a long, long time. I can't tell you how many husbands and dads I've talked to who've said, "I don't get it, Rick. I give my family everything they need. I'm a good provider. I provide for all the needs for my wife and for all my kids. In fact, they don't get just what they need. They get whatever they want. We live a very comfortable life. I don't get it. What more do they want?"

I'll tell you what they want. They want you. They want you! "Look at me, Daddy... Put the paper down and look at me honey! ... Let me have your attention."

Only you can give that. When you give that it means, I'm putting your needs ahead of mine. I'm putting your desire ahead of mine. That's called love. They want you. Nothing can compensate for time. No amount of gifts. No amount of money. No amount of clothes. Kids don't need *things*, they need *parents*. Another video game is not the answer. They need you. You! They need your attention and they need that now.

The Bible says this "*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*" They need it.

Dr. Richard Swenson is one of the world's authorities on stress and he wrote this: "I've come to believe that the speed of society is as much responsible for the problems of personal and social dysfunction as any other single factor. Virtually all of our relationships are damaged by hurry. We're always in a hurry. Many families are being starved to death by velocity. We walk fast,

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we talk fast, eat fast. Then announce, ‘Sorry, I’ve gotta run!’ God, I suspect doesn’t fit any better into our break neck schedules than our children do.”

Chuck Swindoll, a good friend, said this “Busyness destroys relationships. It substitutes shallow frenzy for deep friendship. Busyness feeds the ego but it starves those who love us. It fills the calendar but it fractures the family.”

You say, how do I find more time for the people I love in my life? That’s really the wrong question. They should be the priority. Then you figure out how to fit the rest into that. Not like cram them into your schedule like they’re one of the things.

How do you find more time for the people who love you and that you need to love?

Let me give you one suggestion: turn off the TV and the computer. Recent studies shows that the average American – and of course you all are above average so you do this more I’m sure – watches, sits in front of the television or video screen – the TV screen or the computer screen – working or playing, six hours a day. Average. Six hours a day at five days a week, let’s say you didn’t do it on Saturday and Sunday but of course you do that too. But that’s thirty hours a week. Thirty hours a week for a year is one thousand five hundred and sixty hours in front of a screen.

Let me put that into perspective. That is ninety-seven straight days of sixteen hours a day in front of a screen.

You wonder why you don’t have time for relationships. It always amazed me that people will go watch reruns of *Friends* instead of making friends. Really! And they go home and watch reality shows about somebody else’s family instead of working on the reality of their own family. It’s all spectator instead of participator.

The Bible says “*No matter what I say or what I do or what I believe I’m bankrupt without love.*” The Bible says that God wants you to make time for relationships.

Ephesians says this “*Live a life filled with love for others [There it is again.] following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins.*” Circle “love” and circle “sacrifice” and draw a line between them. If it isn’t a sacrifice it’s not real love. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. If it isn’t a sacrifice it isn’t real love. Love means giving up. It means I give up my agenda for your agenda. It means I give up my time for your time. It means I give up my preference for your preference. It means I give up what I’d rather do right now to do what you’d rather do right now. That is a sacrifice. That is love.

Not all the mushy kind of love you hear on the radio and TV. Love is when I say I’m going to sacrifice what I would like to do and my agenda and my needs for what you’d like to do and your needs and for what you want.

The truth is most of you here today are in time-starved relationships. You are in time-starved relationships! The best use of life is love. And the best expression of love is time. Why is it that we spend the least amount of time with those we love the most? Tell me the logic of that one.

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And work can rob you of your relationships. And hobbies can rob you of relationships. And TV and activities. Here's a poem written by a workaholic dad.

I have a son whose five years old, a boy so very fine.
When I look at him, it seems to me that all the world is mine.
But seldom do I ever see my son awake and bright.
I only see him when he sleeps. I'm only home at night.

When I come home so weary in the darkness after day
My wife then says to me, you should have seen him play.
So I stand beside his bed and I look and I ponder there
And I wonder if he's dreaming "Why isn't daddy here?"

I want to recommend that starting tomorrow morning you get up in the morning and you sit on the side of your bed and before you get off that bed you says this, "God, if I don't get anything else done today I'm going to love you a little bit more and know you a little bit better and I'm going to love the people you've put in my life. Because that's what you put me on earth to do. If I don't get anything else done today I'm going to love you a little bit more [that means spending some time with him] and I'm going to love the other people in my life you put around me [spending some time with them because the best expression of love is time. If at the end of the day you've done that, that day counted.]"

On the other hand, if you didn't do any of that, showing love in any way at all, you've just wasted that day because God didn't put you on earth to mark things off your to do list.

Love is an action. Love means taking time. Love means making somebody else's agenda my agenda.

I don't know if you saw this this week. It's a beautiful story. On the cover of Friday's Orange County Register, on the front page is the story of a seventeen-year-old straight A honor student from Dana Hills High School. He was headed to Harvard until he decided that people in a poor village in Africa needed clean water before he went to Harvard. His name is Ian. For a year he had been planning and convincing his parents to pay for his enrollment at Harvard University in a course on science and physics. He actually turned in his application with a five thousand-dollar deposit and was getting ready to go but then he left for a two week Saddleback Church PEACE trip. And he went to Rwanda. His mom was on that trip. She had been on three PEACE trips.

While he was in Rwanda he discovered a village that had no clean water and the people were getting sick. Still not knowing what to do his heart was moved with love he said, "I will be back." A seventeen year old kid. He said "I don't know how to do this but we're going to figure this out. I will be back."

That's called faith. It's quite a long story. He comes back to Saddleback and he meets a guy named John, a sixty-six year old Saddleback member who was retired and who himself had been on a PEACE trip to another country, Zambia. John introduces Ian, the student, to a simple water purification tool. Ian said, you've got to go back with me to this village in Rwanda. John said,

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“Sorry, I don’t have any money. I spent all my money going on the first PEACE trip.” Ian goes, “I know where to get the money. I will pay for you with my deposit that I made to Harvard.” He convinces his parents and the two go back to Rwanda. Now there’s an entire village that has clean drinking water. When he was asked why he had made this loving sacrifice, Ian said, “Harvard can wait but these people can’t.”

That is love.

I want you to give a warm Saddleback welcome to Ian.

Rick: Ian, you’re a busy student, getting ready to go off to Harvard and doing all your placements. How in the world did you find the time to go on a PEACE trip?

Ian: To be honest, Rick I had almost no time at all. I couldn’t believe I could even go. Between college applications and studying for standardized testing and getting ready for finals, doing my SATs.

Rick: You just had to make it.

Ian: I just had to make it.

Rick: I read in this article that while you’re in Rwanda your dad calls you and says, “You have been accepted at Harvard.” And you said, “Dad, save that money. Trust me. I’m not going.” What in the world did your parents say when you said that?

Ian: First you have to understand that since first grade, even in my first grade yearbook next to “Ian’s Hopes and Dreams” the only thing there that was listed was “To go study at Harvard University.” So you can understand when I said, Dad trust me. I don’t want to go to Harvard right now. They were a little concerned. They were a little confused. But through the whole thing they were completely supportive.

Rick: So what was it that made this flip in your mind?

Ian: To be honest it had to be the first trip I made with my mom in May. There were all these kids that we met, the little children that always wanted to play. Even a boy by the name of John Claude, actually asked me to be his best man at his wedding.

Rick: A lot of these had lost their parents.

Ian: Right. We met a lot of high school students my age who said, “Would you please be my brother? I lost mine because of the genocide.” That really got to me. They said, “When will you come back? Will you please come back?” I told every one of them. I promise you. I promise I’ll be back.”

Rick: You had no idea how you were going to solve this problem. This is called faith. You make a commitment and go, “I’ll be back.” You have no idea how you’re going to solve this problem.

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Ian: I had no idea.

Rick: So you come back and you meet John.

Ian: I come back and I meet John, right. What I like to imagine is just taking that step of faith out of the boat where I feel safe and going out and trusting God. Because all I could do was my best and just hope that God would do his part and sure enough he did.

Rick: If someone wants to be a part, they're doing this in a lot of villages now. We're trying to create water filtration systems, trying to put them with the church so that the church can get the glory and spread it all out. If somebody wants to be a part of one of these, this is one of our PEACE plan projects. How do they be a part of this?

Ian: Right here at Saddleback Church we have a wonderful Saddleback church water initiative who's working on all of this stuff. They're putting on, on the twenty-seventh right here at Saddleback down at the Beach Café, we have a water purification demo. If you come down you can help us out. We can reach our goal of thirty purifiers by the end of this year and get clean water to fifty thousand Rwandans.

Rick: In addition to all of these people there's all the other venues that are watching. They're all here to learn about love for Forty Days of Love. So tell me what you'd say to these people on how to be more loving.

Ian: Rick, you're America's pastor. I'm seventeen!

Rick: Yeah, but I'm out of material and I need somebody to finish this sermon for me. If you'd give me a little filler here.

Ian: Throughout this entire process, or ever since I was a kid, my dad always told me, to get anything done he had a set of threes: get started, get better, and shortly afterwards, get it done.

Rick: Get started, get better, get it done. Thank you, Ian.

Ian's story demonstrates the third great law of love. Law number one the best use of life is love. Law number two the best expression of love is time.

Law number three: **The best time to love is now.**

He didn't wait. The best time to love is now. Not tomorrow. Not later. Not someday. Not one of these days. Not when I get around to it. Not soon. *Now.* Whatever you intend to do with your life do it now. If you have an opportunity to show love, do it now.

A couple weeks ago after we did the Presidential Forum I was doing a message and one of the points was on generosity. Some of you remember I said, do your givin' while you're livin', so you'll be knowin', where it's goin'. In other words I don't understand all these people who say, I'm going to save all my money and when I die I'm going to give it away to charity.

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Why do that? Why not enjoy giving? Why not get the joy of giving by doing it now? Whatever you're going to do, do it now! Give it away now.

There was evidently a couple who caught that concept. A week ago or so one of the envelopes came in. "Pastor Rick, you may want to see this." And there was a little note on it. You know we've been wanting to upgrade this worship center, the screens and the cameras are fifteen years old. They're not even digital. They're analog. And in February every thing in the world goes digital. All television and everything. So we've got to keep up with everybody. These screens have actually been going out and we've been bailing wire and chewing gum behind the scenes keeping them going. They served great for fifteen years but they're about to go out. So we're trying to upgrade everything.

This couple had written a little note with a check. It said, "It'd be great to have some new carpet too," and there was a check for a half million dollars.

So we're going to get some new carpet!

Those people are getting a whole lot more joy out of giving it now than after they're dead. After they die you don't get any joy out of it. You get the joy – do your givin' while you're livin' then you're knowin' where it's going'. So if you want to do a little given' while you're livin' I know where to put it. Ok?

The Bible says "*Whenever we have the opportunity we should do good to everyone.*" Wherever we've got the opportunity. That means now.

"Use every chance you have for doing good." In other words, now.

The Bible says, "*Whenever you possibly can, do good to those who need it. Never tell your neighbor to wait until tomorrow if you can help them now.*"

What am I saying? Never procrastinate in showing love. Don't delay. Don't put it off. Do it now.

Question: Who do you need to show love to today? Who do you need to go home after this service and make that phone call and share a word of encouragement and love? Or go home and write that letter? Or go home and make a visit to somebody in a board and care or convalescent home or at the hospital? Who do you need to invite over to your backyard and have a barbecue with them and show some love? Who is it at your work that everybody can't stand because they're so obnoxious and that person needs massive doses of love and you could show love to the unlovely?

Did you know that God specifically puts people around your life so you can show love to them? He wants you to do that.

There are some activities in life that you ought to procrastinate on. There are some activities in life where procrastination is a legitimate response. Some things you ought to go, "We're just not ready to do that. Let's wait on that. Let's delay. Let's put it off. Let's postpone." That's ok.

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But there's one thing that you should never, never postpone – showing love. If love is the essence of life it's the number one goal in life, it's the reason God put you on earth to learn, then love should always take priority over everything else. Showing love.

Why? Because you don't know how long you're going to have the opportunity. People die. I'm sure that those people on that Metro Link the other day had no idea as they were going home from work "I'm taking my last breath right now... I will never again see my family and they will never again see me on this earth." You don't know when your number's going to be punched. So whatever love you're going to do you better do it now. You better do it now. Circumstances change. Kids grow up. I can't tell you how many empty nester parents have said to me, "Sure wish I'd spent more time with my kids before they left home."

In the 1972 election George McGovern was running against Richard Nixon and McGovern and Charles Colson were on opposite sides of the political spectrum. But they both ended up with the same regrets. Chuck Colson wrote this, "As I think back on my life my biggest regret is not spending more time with my kids. Making family your top priority means going against a culture where materialism and workaholism are rampant. It means realizing that you may not advance as fast in your career as others do. It means being willing to accept a lower standard of living knowing that you're doing it for your kids. It means giving them the emotional security that they'll draw on for the rest of their lives."

Then George McGovern, one time presidential candidate wrote a book about his daughter Terry who died in 1994. She was an alcoholic. They found her frozen to death in a snowdrift in a drunken stupor. After his daughter died, George McGovern poured over her diaries and contacted many of her friends and he discovered that he hadn't been the parent that he thought he was. While he was reading her diaries he discovered this, while he was spending eighteen hours a day working for political causes Terry was writing in her diary how much she missed her daddy. And that he probably didn't care about her anyway." McGovern's message to parents: "Show more love to your kids by spending more time with them. Especially as teenagers. No matter what it costs your career. That way," he said "neither of you will have regrets."

Then this was a very poignant quote. He said "I'd give everything I have – and I mean *everything* – for one more afternoon with Terry. Just to let her know how much I loved her and to have one more of those happy times that we used to have so infrequently."

Friends, the question is not whether we're ever going to regret living an overloaded, furiously driven life. The question is just *when*.

I saw a book title the other day. It caught my attention. It was a book on anorexia. The title of the book was Starving for Attention. You know anybody like that? I do. Everybody is starving for attention. *Everybody is starving for attention!*

So what are you going to do about it? Are you going to change? Are we just going to go through 40 Days of Love and talk about love and you go, "That was nice," and that's it? But not any more loving?

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Let me tell you my goal for 40 Days of Love. My goal is that I will become more loving. I don't know about you but I'm fed up with the level of loving I'm at. When I do serious looking at my life I can see a whole lot more of me than I like. I know that one day I'm going to stand before God, and God's going to say to me, not, "Rick, what did you accomplish with your life? How much money did you give away? How many people did you help?" He's going to say this: "Did you do what I put you on earth to do? Did you learn to love me more than anything else? Did you spend time with me? That's how you show love. Did you learn to love everybody else? And did you spend time with them?"

I, more than anything else want to be known as a loving person. I want people to look at me and go, "A little overweight, but that guy loves. He knows how to love people. He really knows how to love people. He is a godly man. He knows how to love." I want to be that.

I hope you want to be that too. I hope you're not satisfied with your shallow love because shallow love only loves people who love you. Serious, mature love says, I love people who are unlovely. I love people who don't love me. I love people who irritate me. I love people who attack me. I love the way Jesus loved.

That's what we're going to do in these forty days.

Are you ready to get serious? I told you that each week I'm going to give you some homework. This week I want you to take five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen – you decide – every day to talk with each of your family members. And to listen. Look them in the face and listen. You may need to apologize. You may need to sympathize. But spend some time with the people God has put in your life. The best use of life is love. The best expression of love is time. The best time to love is now.

Prayer:

Father, it's so easy to get distracted from what's most important. Knowing and loving you and knowing and loving those around us. Forgive us for being task driven instead of love driven. Forgive us for valuing things and accomplishments more than people.

Now you pray. In your heart say this, "Father, thank you for this wake up call today. I needed it. I know what matters most even when my schedule doesn't show it. I thank you for this reminder today. I know the people who love me are a gift from you. Please forgive me for taking them for granted. Forgive me for allowing other things to crowd out my relationship to you, and allowing other things to crowd out my relationship to others. I know this is going to mean making some sacrifices. But I want to slow down and make time for loving relationships. I want to change. Jesus, you modeled real love when you sacrificed yourself for me. I thank you for that. I want to love you and trust you. I ask you to forgive me and fill me with your love. I want to follow you in life and love. And I want to make love the primary aim of my life..."

[end of tape]